

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS GLORIA MOLINA AND  
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May 22, 2007

In January, the Board of Supervisors approved a Countywide Energy and Environmental Policy that includes the Environmental Stewardship Program. Since this policy was approved, this Board has begun examining various opportunities for reducing the County's "environmental footprint" through direct and indirect County operations.

One issue that merits further study is the degrading environmental impacts of polystyrene use throughout Los Angeles County. Expanded polystyrene (polystyrene) food containers, commonly known as Styrofoam®, contributes to the volume of waste disposed at landfills because it is difficult to recycle and non-biodegradable. It is also one of the most common littered items due to its lightweight properties and is easily blown out of overflowing trash receptacles. Since litter ends up in our storm drain system and eventually on our beaches, studies have shown that over half of all floating marine debris collected at our local beaches are polystyrene food containers. Upon entering the marine environment, polystyrene food containers break down into smaller pieces which negatively impacts water quality and harms marine wildlife, which often mistake the polystyrene pieces for food. The cumulative negative impact of polystyrene food containers on our environment poses serious health and safety concerns, results in

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significant costs to residents, and negatively impacts the County's recreational and tourism economy.

For example, in order to reduce the number of polystyrene food containers and other littered items from entering the County's storm drain system, the County of Los Angeles annually spends millions of dollars on flood control channel/catch basin/roadside cleanups, capital improvements, street sweeping, storm water pollution prevention activities, best management practices, and public education and outreach programs. In addition, thousands of residents annually volunteer countless hours in beach, roadside, park, and neighborhood cleanups.

To protect our environment and reduce the impact to taxpayers, it is critical that we take the lead in promoting the use of environmentally friendly alternatives to polystyrene food containers. As one of the largest public agencies utilizing polystyrene food containers in this region, the County of Los Angeles can substantially enhance the market for environmentally friendly alternatives by prohibiting the purchase and use of polystyrene food containers, while setting an example to encourage other jurisdictions and the private sector to implement similar policies. Currently, numerous local governments, such as the Cities of Calabasas, Malibu, Santa Monica, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Huntington Beach and San Francisco, and the County of Ventura, have adopted policies to prohibit the purchase and use of polystyrene food containers at their facilities -- and in some cases, all food service establishments within their jurisdiction. In addition, the State Legislature is considering passage of Assembly Bill 820 (Karnette) to ban the purchase and use of polystyrene food containers at all State facilities, including universities and colleges. Furthermore, many large fast-food chains have voluntarily replaced their polystyrene food containers with more environmentally friendly alternatives.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board:

1. Instruct the Director of Public Works, in consultation with the Director of Internal Services and County Counsel, to investigate the impact of prohibiting the purchase and use of expanded polystyrene food containers at all County-owned facilities, County offices, County-managed concessions, County-permitted events, and County-sponsored events, and report back in 90 days with recommendations, including:

- a.) A recommendation on the earliest practical effective date for such prohibition.
- b.) A recommendation on whether there should be a case-by-case temporary waiver as a result of contractual obligations or if there are no other viable alternatives for specific products.
- c.) A description of the proposed outreach program to provide information and assistance in identifying environmentally friendly alternatives to expanded polystyrene food containers.

2. Instruct the Director of Public Works, in consultation with County Counsel, to investigate and report back in six months on the feasibility of prohibiting the use of expanded polystyrene food containers at all food service establishments and retail stores in the Unincorporated County Areas, including recommended changes to the County Code; and

3. Instruct the County's Legislative Advocates in Sacramento to pursue passage of AB 820 (Karnette) which seeks to ban the selling, possession, or distribution of expanded polystyrene food containers at State facilities, including universities and colleges; and

4. Instruct the Chief Administrative Officer to update the County's policies and proposals for the 2007-2008 State Legislative Session to pursue legislation which promotes

market development and manufacturer stewardship of products made of alternatives to polystyrene; and

5. Instruct the Director of Public Works work to enhance the educational and public outreach campaign to encourage Los Angeles County residents, public agencies, school districts and Cities on environmentally friendly alternatives to polystyrene.

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